District Review Report
Final

School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay)

April 7 – April 9, 2003

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Doug Pearson, Superintendent, School District No. 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)

104-06666/

School District No. 5 (Southeast Kootenay) Review Report

District Name: Southeast Kootenay School District

District Number: 5

Superintendent: Roy McLean

Date of Visit: April 6 to 9, 2003

Team Chair: Doug Pearson, Superintendent of Schools, North Okanagan Shuswap School District

Team Members: Art Blackwell (Principal), Rick Erickson (Deputy Superintendent), Judy MacPherson (Parent), Jerry Mussio (Ministry of Education), Gail Sumanik (Principal), Marion Turner (Director of Instruction), Lorna Williams (Director of Aboriginal Education of the Ministry of Education)

Context

The purpose of the district review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the district, the Ministry of Education and the public regarding the district's work in improving student achievement by:

- Reviewing district and school achievement data.
- Reviewing the district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement.
- Making recommendations to the Board and to the Minister about improving student achievement.
- Identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

The District Review Team recognizes that the Southeast Kootenay School District is in a transition process to the new Accountability and Achievement focus. Parallel to this transition process the school district faces the additional challenges of previous amalgamation issues, and declining resources due to declining enrollment and a widely dispersed District.

The Southeast Kootenay School District Review is one of twenty reviews being conducted by the Ministry of Education during the 2002/2003 school year.

Summary of Process

The District Review Team is appreciative of the support it received from the District in addressing the objectives of the district visit. At school and district levels, the team found an openness and willingness to engage thoughtfully and meaningfully in the review process.

The District Review Team initially met with representatives of the Southeast Kootenay School District to discuss student achievement and the district accountability contract. District representatives at this meeting included: the Chair of the Board of School Trustees, the Chair of the Education Committee, the Superintendent of Schools, and the Assistant Superintendents of Schools.

The discussion of the District's Accountability Contract was based on ten "key areas of inquiry", provided by the Ministry. Each area of inquiry is based on current school and district effectiveness and improvement research. The ten "key areas of inquiry" also provided the framework for the discussion with school teams and the report by the District Review Team to the district, the Ministry of Education and the public.

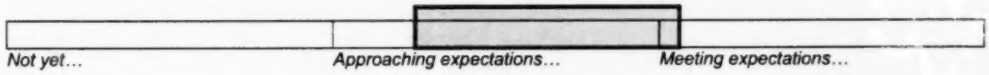
The District Review Team then met with twelve school teams: Highlands Elementary, Laurie Junior Secondary, T.M. Roberts Elementary, Pinewood Elementary, Steeples Elementary, Mt. Baker Secondary, Rocky Mountain Elementary, Fernie Secondary, Gordon Terrace Elementary, Frank J. Mitchell Elementary, Isabella Dicken Elementary, and Jaffray Elementary-Junior Secondary. Membership and size for the school teams varied across the district but included students, parents, teachers, support staff, school principals and vice principals

The Review Team studied various district and school planning documents, student achievement results and supporting data and reports, and met with representatives of the Teachers' Association and DPAC, the Director of Education and Social Services for Saint Mary's Band, the Principal's and Vice Principal's Association, and the District Goal Leaders.

At the conclusion of the report, the Review Team reported out to three trustee representatives and the District Management staff (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Secretary-Treasurer, Director of Human Resources).

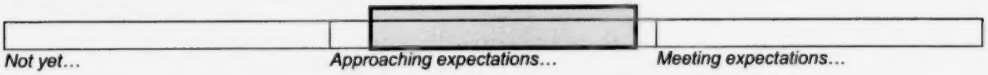
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student learning.



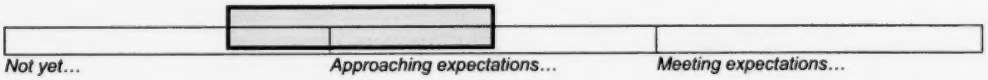
- The goals of the District's Accountability Contract are clearly stated and focused on student achievement.
- Due to the complexity of the Aboriginal population in District 5, work needs to be done to understand the diverse needs of this population in order to set appropriate goals.
- Several schools have clear, evidence-based goals for supporting student achievement.
- Dates for long-term targets are not stated.

2. *Rationale:*
Improving districts have a thorough and connected set of reasons based on evidence for the selection of their student achievement goals.



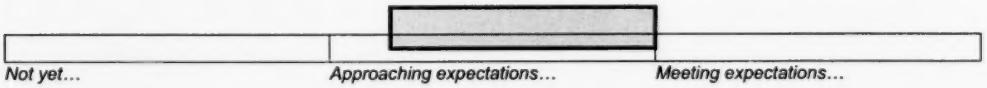
- The current Accountability Cycle builds District Goals based on school goals. The analysis of district data is not evident in the cycle.
- The Team recommends that the District analyze district evidence to ensure the goals represent the highest level of importance.
- The modeling of a District process for data collection, analysis and prioritizing of goals would be helpful to everyone in the system.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district / provincial data. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals.



- The Team notes that the District is in the process of developing a data collection system.
- Currently, there is no structure in place to collect and analyze district data and the use of data is not consistent across district.
- There appears to be a lack of knowledge around using data. Training needed across the system.
- The district and school goals rely primarily on analysis of provincial data. Classroom and school data are not widely used.
- The Team notes that the District and schools are not disaggregating data to understand and address achievement of subgroups.

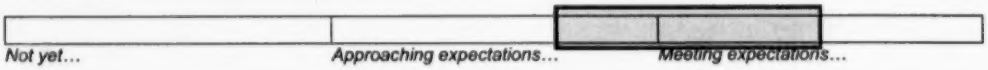
4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- In some school plans, the Review Team noticed a lack of alignment between strategies and goals.
- The District identified use of Performance Standards as a strategy. However, the Team noted that not all schools are using the Performance Standards.
- The District provides Professional Development to support
    - Early Literacy .
    - Writing
    - Social Responsibility (EBS)

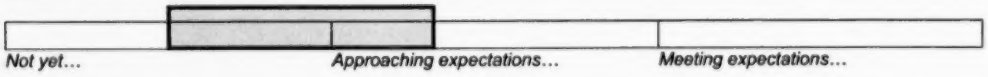
- The Team notes that strategies to address the specific needs of Aboriginal students are limited.
- The Team would encourage the District to raise the profile of involvement for the Aboriginal Education Curriculum/Language Facilitator in the design of literacy strategies to support aboriginal students. Additionally, the Team suggests that the aboriginal communities be consulted in detail to assist in the integration of the cultural and language perspectives.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts have aligned structures – resources, time, organization – to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



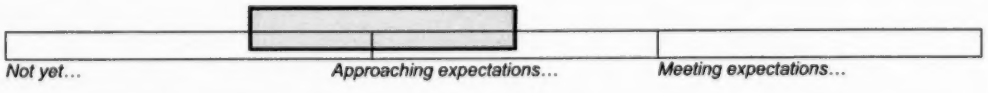
- The District has recognized the need to support district goals and has responded with a number of initiatives:
    - Early Literacy Support
    - School level budget for implementation of school growth plans
    - Budget to support School Action Research Projects
    - District Professional Development opportunities focused on goal areas

6. *Results:*
Improving districts get improved student learning results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



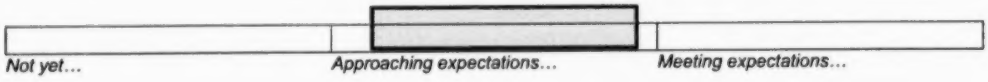
- Currently, there is little evidence in school and District plans of tracking student achievement progress using classroom and school level. It will be difficult to track progress year to year using only provincial FSA and survey data.
- The Team encourages the District to develop ways of tracking results that come from implementing planned strategies and then building on those results.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts communicate and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made.



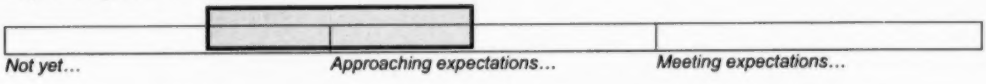
- The Team observes that the district is in the process of creating a District Communication Policy.
- All partner groups are aware of the District Goals but have not been informed of progress.

8. *Teamwork*: District and School Coherence
Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



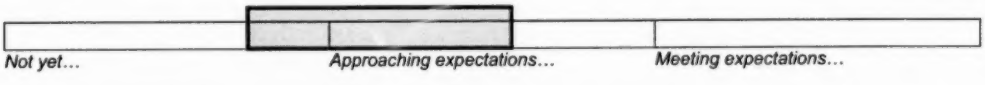
- In some schools, the connection between school and district goals is not clear.
- It is not evident in the planning cycle how District goals inform and guide school goals.

9. *Teamwork*: District and Parent Involvement
Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, on improving student learning.



- The District has identified the need for a more inclusive process for development of District goals. Parents and the Aboriginal Community were not involved in the development of the 2002/03 District Accountability Contract.
- District support and training for School Planning Councils was very much appreciated.
- Parents were very involved in some schools in the setting of goals.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for and commitment to school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice principals, teacher, parent and student leadership is encouraged and systematically developed – with a focus on improving student learning.



- The District Leadership Team has communicated the expectation that schools develop school improvement plans based on student achievement.
- The Team observes a need for the District to review plans with schools to assure that school goals are evidence based and goals are significant.
- There are some fine examples of leadership in the district. The Team suggests that the district identify these leaders to assist in building capacity in the District.

Strengths

Team observations of particular strengths related to student achievement.

- District Professional Development supporting school and District goals
- Budget allocated to support School Growth Plans
- Many informed parents who are supportive of schools and the Accountability Cycle
- District training for School Planning Council
- Support for Literacy at District

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus:

- 5/9 writing project.
- One on One reading program in elementary schools
- Extensive EBS training and support
- District budgets to support School Growth Plans and
- Budget to support Action Research Projects at schools

Recommendations

The Team makes the following recommendations for strengthening school and District focus on student achievement and for improving results.

Leadership and the Planning Process

- The Team identifies a need for district leadership and assistance for schools in collecting and analyzing data and creating focused school plans.

Instruction and Assessment

- Continue and extend the work with Performance Standards including using assessment to inform instruction.

Aboriginal Community

- The Team recommends that the District expand its knowledge and awareness of the aboriginal learners and community in SD 5 and bring aboriginal expertise into the schools and District to assist in the development and implementation of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement as part of its Accountability Cycle.
- The Team recommends that the District initiate culturally appropriate strategies to engage the diverse Aboriginal communities in all areas of school and District life.

Involvement of parents

- The Team recommends that the District assist parents, including the Aboriginal parents, to become more informed about and involved in the Accountability Cycle.

Follow Up (to be determined by Ministry of Education)

Required follow up with specific time frame may take the form of:

- Ministry phone call
- Deputy Minister visit
- District report to the Ministry
- Review of the next year's district contract
- Special Advisor appointment